

VA-HUD APPROPRIATIONS BILL

• Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator BOND, Senator MIKULSKI, and all the members of the VA-HUD Appropriations Subcommittee for all their hard work in bringing this bill to the floor so quickly and with such widespread support. I want to add my voice to the many others offering you congratulations for such a good product.

I appreciate the understanding and expertise both of you bring to this bill. Your sensitivity to the need to create new affordable housing and homeownership opportunities serves every Member of the Senate well.

Unfortunately, no amount of good intentions and hard work can make up for the basic lack of funding for housing programs in this bill. While the bill maintains funding for most crucial programs, existing funding levels will not really solve the housing problems we face in this country.

Let us take a moment to put the problem into a broader context. There are about 16.5 million families that are eligible for housing assistance in America. Yet, only 4.3 million of these families receive any housing assistance whatsoever. This includes households living in public housing, assisted housing, housing built with the tax credit and HOME funds.

Of the 12 million unassisted families, about 5.5 million are faced with desperate housing needs, yet are receiving no help at all from the Federal Government.

These families are paying over half their incomes every month to keep a roof over their heads. Or, they live in housing that is falling down around them. These families teeter on the edge of homelessness. One unanticipated problem—a temporary layoff, an illness of a parent or child, even an unexpected car repair bill—can force these families to choose between paying the rent and buying groceries.

The committee did a good job of addressing many competing needs and interests that go far beyond housing programs. But they have simply not been given enough resources to address the larger need for adequate affordable housing.

The fact is, we are facing a likely reduction in the total affordable housing stock in America. We expect about 100,000 units of public housing to be demolished in the next several years. Private owners of some assisted housing are likely to prepay their subsidized mortgages to get out from under the affordable housing restrictions. Many owners of section 8 project-based housing will simply choose not to renew their contracts, eliminating some of the highest quality affordable housing stock in the inventory.

We cannot continue to go in this direction unless we are prepared to face a huge increase in the problem of homelessness. Already, in a time of low unemployment and strong economic growth, we have seen an increase in

homelessness of 5 percent, according to a Conference of Mayors study.

Mr. President, one casualty of the fiscal constraints that the committee labored within is the Low Income Housing Preservation and Homeownership Act [LIHPRH], better known as the Preservation Program. This program has preserved over 80,000 units of affordable housing permanently. Another 30,000 units in 37 States await funding. While the GAO has raised some concerns about this program, I want to make sure the facts get in the record. The average cost of preserving this housing is \$30,000 to \$33,000 per unit. This housing could not possibly be replaced for such a cheap price in my home State of Massachusetts, nor, I suspect, in many other States, either.

Given the overall reduction of affordable housing, the modest investment it would take to preserve this housing, housing that is unlikely to otherwise be replaced, is a wise investment indeed.

I urge the committee to work in conference to find some funding for this crucial program. I know Senator BOND's interest in accomplishing this goal, along with appropriate reforms to the program.

In doing so, I urge the chairman to adopt a priority for direct sales to tenants. One of the key elements of the Preservation Program has been to empower residents to participate in the decisionmaking regarding how their homes are to be preserved. Sales to the residents who live in these communities is the most direct way to achieve this important goal. It gives the tenants the opportunity to build equity, like other homeowners; it gives tenants a greater stake in the management of the property. In sum, Mr. President, it builds a bridge to the middle class for the residents of these projects. I would be happy to work with the chairman to achieve this goal.

Mr. President, I thank my colleagues for all their hard work. I support this bill and urge my colleagues to do so, as well. I will continue to work for more funding for housing programs, and look forward to the day when the chairman and ranking member are able to fully fund the needs of public housing, assisted housing, and the many other demands they face as well.●

TRIBUTE TO HAMILTON FISH

• Mr. D'AMATO. Mr. President, one year ago today, our friend and former colleague in the other body, Hamilton Fish, died here in Washington.

Ham and his forebears, statesman and patriots to a man, were gifts to our Nation's Capital from New York where they emerged from immigrant roots that were truly extraordinary in the American experience.

In the years I knew Ham, I saw reflected in his bearing, his code of life, his approach to the law and devotion to public service, a man whose very genes held rich lessons of bravery, honesty,

integrity and patriotism handed down from those who had formed this Nation, nurtured and served it since the 17th Century. And yet he never let on about the first Mayor of New York, the last Mayor of Brooklyn, a hero of the Battle of Yorktown who looks down from the nearby Rotunda's wall, the Secretary of State, the Senators, Rough Riders and Members of the House of Representatives who filled his family tree.

An impressive lineage was not what was important to him. To Ham, what one did in the time allotted by God was what mattered.

Officially, Hamilton Fish, was the 13-term Congressman from the Empire State's Hudson Valley, who from his earliest years in Congress wrestled with the turmoil of Watergate and the Vietnam war, the causes of civil rights, refugees, the environment, and a daily concern that Washington respond to and be a positive influence for his constituents and all Americans.

He was neither a "hawk" nor a "dove" in the contentious and important issues of his time, but rather an impressive "owl"—a wise owl, using head and heart, with the talons to fight a ferocious battle when needed, but possessing the sharp ears and keen eyes to recognize and counsel for the strength to be gained from collegial compromise; knowing the ways to bridge often great divides of politics and ideologies.

Ham Fish was also a very private figure in our midst. The deep love he shared with his wife and family was obvious soon after first meeting him; but the little known, almost spiritual way he approached, planned and prepared for each and every one of his days until he died, whether for legislating, trout fishing or making a favorite soup recipe, being with his grandchildren near his beloved Hudson River or meeting with the famous or not so famous, was astonishing. Hamilton Fish the private man knew each and every day was to be cherished; taken all in all, of limited number and deserving to be filled with actions and thoughts that were positive, moral and strong.

His memory will remain strong for all of us that worked with him. I hope those who are just beginning their lives of public service will take a moment today to think about Hamilton Fish of New York . . . a genuine gift to our nation.●

DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1998

The text of the bill (H.R. 2158) making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1998, and for other purposes, as passed by the Senate on July 22, 1997, is as follows: